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Soviet Embassy employee defects

STATINTL

By DONALD R. MORRIS
Post News Analyst

Evgeniy Sorokine, 24, an employee of the GRU Rezidentura in the Soviet Embassy in Vientiane, Laos, has defected to the United States.

According to AP and UPI reports, Sorokine and his wife Tatiana were posted to Laos in 1971, where he was assigned duties as driver and French interpreter for Col. Vladimir P. Gretchanine.

Gretchanine was listed as a Soviet military attache. In the early 1960s, Gretchanine was posted to Washington, and was expelled in the course of a quid pro quo reprisal for several U.S. diplomats expelled from Moscow at the time.

ON SEPT. 10 Sorokine's car was found crashed into a tree halfway between the Soviet Embassy and Vientiane Airport. That evening he requested political asylum at

the U.S. Embassy, and the following day he was flown out of Laos, probably on a chartered Air America flight.

Sorokine is now reported to be in the United States. Tatiana Sorokine remains in Vientiane.

These are the bare outlines of a story that will not be expanded on by official U.S. sources, at least for some time to come. Several conclusions, however, may be drawn.

Sorokine was an employee of the Soviet military intelligence service, the GRU; he was not attached to the KGB. All personnel attached to the Soviet military attache office are employees or officers of the GRU, and never of the KGB. Gretchanine is, and always was, a GRU officer.

SOROKINE WAS, most likely, not an officer, but an employee whose duties were exactly as given; driver-interpreter to Col. Gretchanine, whose rank indicates he was

probably the GRU Resident -- the officer in command of the GRU Rezidentura.

Although not an agent handler, Sorokine will be nonetheless valuable. He will be able to provide a complete breakdown of the GRU Rezidentura, including those offi-

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cers under other covers outside of the Military Attache Office. He will undoubtedly be able to identify a goodly proportion of the KGB Rezidentura as well. His duties would also have enabled him to identify a number of GRU agents, developmental cases and spotting leads as well.

Several aspects of the story hint that Sorokine may be something of a handling problem. More than twenty officers of the Soviet intelligence services have defected to Western countries. It is the act of a deeply maladjusted man, a misfit in his own society who is, by cutting off his entire past life with no

hope of return, in effect, taking what may be the only alternative to suicide open to him. For complex psychological reasons, defection almost never occurs before middle age, and Sorokine, at 24, is quite possibly the youngest GRU defector to reach the West.

THE CRASHED car indicates further agitation and a spur-of-the-moment decision. Under no circumstances would this be some form of window-dressing to mislead the Soviets; the CIA eschews such James Bondish dramatics.

Sorokine's desertion of his wife may be still further evidence of disturbance; had the defection been planned in advance with CIA assistance she could easily have been evacuated as well. (But several defections have been triggered by the urge to escape an impossible marital situation.)

The Soviets reported that Sorokine was missing to the Laotian Foreign Ministry the same day he was flown out of the country. They dropped their standard gambit in such cases, which was to charge that the defector had absconded with the embassy petty cash fund and should be treated as a common criminal. Either they placed little reliance in the Laotian police, or they knew he was out of the country when they reported his absence.

THE CIA is to be commended for the speed with which Sorokine was evacuated; even in Laos such operations pose administrative problems, especially with a sudden walk-in. Over the years, they have been able to count on such a defection every 18 months or so, to implement the knowledge gained from their independent penetrations of the Soviet services.

Sorokine, in fact, may be astonished to find that his hosts know more about the GRU than he does. It has happened before.

The World

Defector Undefects

First, the Soviet Embassy car was found last October near Zeebrugge, the Belgian ferry port for Britain. Then, a report that a Soviet military intelligence major, Anatoly Chebotarev, 38, had walked into the United States Embassy in Brussels, whence he was whisked to Washington for interrogation by the Central Intelligence Agency. In Washington, the defector reportedly "blew the cover" for 37 or so Soviet agents in Belgium who had been using supersensitive electronic gear to eavesdrop on phone conversations at NATO headquarters. They quickly left Belgium and Major Chebotarev settled down to exile in the United States.

But four days before Christmas, the major met a top Soviet diplomat at the State Department. After returning to his Washington apartment, he slipped away from his C.I.A. escort and turned up in the Soviet Embassy. Finally, last Sunday night aboard a Soviet airliner, he returned to Moscow.

Was his defection a Soviet ruse to disrupt Western intelligence? If not, why did he risk execution as a traitor when he returned to Russia? Neither the C.I.A. nor the Russian Embassy was saying.

STATINTL

An Agent Who Defected to U.S. Goes Back to Soviet

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN
 Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 27—A Soviet intelligence agent who defected to the United States in October returned to the Soviet Union last night after eluding his American escorting officer, the State Department announced today.

Charles W. Bray 3d, the department spokesman, said that the agent was Anatoly K. Chebotarev, a former major in the Soviet military intelligence, known as GRU. Mr. Bray said Mr. Chebotarev had left his secret Washington area hiding place on Dec. 23 and the next day was reported in the Soviet Embassy by Yuli M. Vorontsev, the Soviet chargé d'affaires. Mr. Vorontsev said that Mr. Chebotarev wanted to return know as G.R.U. Mr. Bray said

An Immigration and Naturalization Service officer interrogated him at Kennedy International Airport in New York last night, in the presence of State Department officers, and that he was convinced that the man wanted to go back to the Soviet Union of his own volition, and allowed him to de-

part aboard an Aeroflot plane to Moscow.

"We are convinced he returned on his own free will," Mr. Bray said. "We think he was a genuine defector who changed his mind."

May Face Death Sentence

If Mr. Chebotarev were a genuine defector he would face treason charges and a possible death sentence on his return to Moscow.

It was disclosed here that Mr. Chebotarev had "cooperated" with Central Intelligence Agency interrogators after he was flown to the United States on Oct. 7.

That was four days after he walked into the United States Embassy in Brussels and asked for help in getting to the United States.

His defection came several weeks after Oleg Lyalin, an agent for the K.G.B., the Soviet civilian security agency, defected in London and provided information leading to the expulsion of 105 Soviet representatives in Britain.

Mr. Bray said that Mr. Chebotarev was officially attached

to the Soviet trade mission in Brussels as an engineer, but "was in reality a Soviet major in military intelligence."

After being flown to the United States, Mr. Chebotarev "cooperated fully" with his interrogators, "at his own request," it was said.

He was living in "a Washington area apartment," Mr. Bray said, with a male escort officer, presumably from the C.I.A.

On Dec. 21, at the request of the Soviet Embassy here, and with Mr. Chebotarev's agreement, a meeting was arranged at the State Department between Mr. Chebotarev and Mr. Vorontsev, Mr. Bray said.

Gets News From Family

At that meeting, attended by two State Department officers, Mr. Vorontsev gave to Mr. Chebotarev "a number of pieces of correspondence from his family," Mr. Bray said. Mr. Chebotarev, who is 38 years old, is married and has children.

"At that time, Mr. Chebotarev told Vorontsev that he had come to the United States on his own free will and had no desire to return to the Soviet Union," Mr. Bray said.

Then, at 7:30 P.M. last Thurs-

day, Mr. Chebotarev left his apartment, telling his escort officer that he was planning to walk around the apartment house, as he had previously done, Mr. Bray said.

He did not return to the apartment that night.

Friday afternoon Mr. Bray said, Mr. Vorontsev telephoned Richard T. Davies, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, and informed him that the Soviet Government wanted the cooperation of the American Government in the return of Mr. Chebotarev to the Soviet Union.

Mr. Bray said that Mr. Vorontsev had told Mr. Davies that the defector was in the Soviet Embassy and had told embassy officials of his desire to return to his family and home.

Following "careful consideration" within the United States Government, Mr. Bray said, Mr. Vorontsev was informed that because Mr. Chebotarev was a "parolee," whose status had to be determined by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, that agency had to decide his final status and whether he could return to the Soviet Union.